

# NYLON

A full-page photograph of Rachel Bilson, a young woman with long, wavy reddish-brown hair, looking over her shoulder at the camera. She is wearing a dark blue jacket with gold chain detailing over a pink top and a light pink skirt.

FASHION  
SPECIAL!

## RACHEL BILSON: CALIFORNIA SWEETHEART

ONE STEP  
AHEAD:  
ULTRA-MODERN  
ACCESSORIES

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VAMPIRE WEEKEND  
AND GUS VAN SANT



THIS  
SPRING,  
UNDERWEAR-  
INSPIRED  
LOOKS  
COME OUT  
ON TOP.

# I SEE LONDON, I SEE FRANCE...



Some day, just for fun, try Google-ing the terms "celebrity whale tail." Not only do the resulting 140,000 some-odd hits turn up plenty of lurid shots of actresses, singers and socialites, they also succinctly illustrate just how unattractive exposed underwear can be—and how ubiquitous it is. So-called unmentionables are not only mentionable, they're part of our visual culture, our water-cooler gossip, and our time-killing strategies while bored at work. In fact, thanks to the pervasiveness of visible skivvies, bra straps, lace trim, and even the occasional crotch-flash, there's even a new locker-room lexicon for trash-talking those who commit these fashion no-nos: "milk-and-cookies" (white top, black bra), "quadraboob" (when a bra is so tight it creates additional, not-hot cleavage), and, of course, the "whale tail" (a thong breaching over the back of a low-rise pant waist). And yet, despite how lowbrow these faux-pas come off—or even perhaps partly because of it—boudoir attire suddenly has a starring role.

Contrary to the sage advice to keep your bra straps tucked away and your underwear out of sight, this spring, designers are doing exactly what mom always told you not to: Letting it all hang out. Marc Jacobs' spring collection includes trousers, dresses, and skirts wittily emblazoned with trompe l'oeil underwear, and bralettes that brazenly peek out from beneath jackets and shifts. Negligees double as dresses in both Christian Dior's and Nina Ricci's spring lineups, a few of Derek Lam's slinky dresses bear a striking resemblance to Hefner's silk robes, and sheer voile pants and tops made appearances at Prada and Alessandro dell'Acqua's runway shows, barely concealing breasts and belly-buttons, and putting boyshorts and bras on display. And though these looks are technically distant cousins of fashion blunders like the exposed thong and obvious, in-your-face panty lines, it's safe to say that they don't carry the same sort of stigma as, say, that cresting G-string that caused mom to screech, "You're going out looking like *that*?"

Lingerie has a universe of connotations in itself, with its own matrix of demure-to-pussycat and utilitarian-to-sexy scales—even when it doesn't leave the privacy of the bedroom. High-end loungewear lines from the likes of Kiki De Montparnasse, Agent Provocateur, and Coco de Mer, to name a few, have made items such as garters and cupless bras posh and frisky rather than slutty, and such luxurious stores have women who previously might never have set foot in a Frederick's of

BY MARISSA PATLINGRAO COOLEY. PHOTOGRAPHED BY GLYNIS SELINA ARBAN

stylist: jenny ricker at the wall group. hair: travis speck at bumble and bumble. makeup: kristin gallegos at bryan bantry. model: alex p at ford. top and skirt by marc jacobs, bandeau top by 3.1 phillip lim, bikini bottom by agent provocateur, rings by broken english, bracelets by allison daniel, belt by chanel. opposite page: tank by raquel weiss, bra top by stella mccartney, slip by vena cava, vintage knee highs.

Hollywood or Trashy Lingerie now asking if the “spank-me panty” comes in pink.

But still, lingerie in both the high and low camps is titillating by design, and the point of this spring's sheer tops and lacy exposés isn't to make you blush. Bras this season aren't paired with tarty miniskirts, but made visible, X-ray-style, under transparent, to-the-neck dresses or tops, or displayed under casually unbuttoned long-sleeve blouses or jackets, with sober, high-waisted pants or shorts. While lingerie's ostensible mission is to arouse, this season's looks, rather, are an homage to the exquisite lines and construction of intimates—and a signal that anything, including skivvies, is fair game to wear out.

“Historically, lingerie has been here before. We go in and out of modest times,” points out Victoria Bartlett, designer of VPL (also known as Visible Panty Line), the fashion label founded on the concept of underwear as sportswear. Bartlett, an avid collector of vintage underpinnings, cites several highlights of underwear's influence in fashion history, beginning with a 1920s dancer named Anita Berber, who performed publicly in her underwear and influenced style icons like Marlene Dietrich. Since then, lingerie, like other trends, has come in waves: To wit, Comme des Garçons 2005 collection with frilly petticoats, as well as the one of the first Miu Miu shows in the mid-'90s, cast underwear in a public role. “Also, remember when Madonna was wearing lingerie out?” asks Bartlett, referring to Madge's circa-Blonde Ambition Tour cone bra. “That was also when Gaultier showed it.”

Decades later, here we are again. But this time around, with the collective gaze back on the lingerie drawer, the creativity stakes feel heightened, as if the countless images of panty-clad (or worse, panty-less) boldfacers splashed across the blogosphere and the gossip rags have deadened us to the shock, and have double-dared designers—and the public, as consumers of fashion—to take the notion a step further and bring underwear permanently out of the closet. The blurring of what's meant to be hidden and what's meant to be exposed might explain the tide of fashion houses that set out as designers of delicates and then expanded into full-blown sportswear collections: Araks Yeramyán, who originally launched her line, Araks, as an intimates range, has been doing ready-to-wear since she debuted at New York's Spring '07 collections. Meanwhile, Adam Lippes, who founded AdamLippes in the pursuit of the

LINGERIE'S  
STRONG  
APPEARANCE  
IN THIS  
SPRING'S  
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WAGGING  
SPECTACLE  
WHEN WORN  
IN PUBLIC.



perfect undershirt, has just rechristened the label as ADAM, and this spring, unveils a store in New York's Meatpacking District devoted not only to his super-soft pima cotton T-shirts but also to a full sportswear line and even vintage furniture. In a way, lingerie's strong appearance in this spring's collections marks the end of its stigma as a jaw-dropping, finger-wagging spectacle when worn in public, and ushers it into time when boudoir-inspired pieces are as common an embellishment as a pair of earrings or patterned stockings.

Which begs the question: Where's the line between a flash of nipple beneath a sheer top at Prada, and an unfortunate wardrobe malfunction? And, for that matter, exactly what separates an exposed bandeau bra at Martin Margiela from the sight of a starlet who has yet to learn how to exit a limo?

Maybe it's an old-fashioned dose of granny-panty-ish modesty—Can you picture even one image of Audrey Hepburn flashing a bra strap?—but more likely, it is the intention, and a very fashionable one at that, to use underwear not as something to shock, appall, or seduce, but to adorn. “T&A exists in so many other universes that, in fashion, I don't find it modern,” Bartlett says. “This look is about underwear as an integral part of your whole uniform—it's part of the outfit, an accessory instead of this dirty little secret.”

top and shoes by ysl, slip by victoria's secret, skirt by  
alessandro dell'acqua, hat by 3.1 phillip lim. opposite page:  
top by miss sixty, skirt by marc jacobs, bra and panty by  
chanel, vintage necklace by broken english.